

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

September 4, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross, Jr.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Steven Dillingham, Ph.D.  
Director  
U.S. Census Bureau  
4600 Silver Hill Road  
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Secretary Ross and Director Dillingham:

As Members of Michigan's Congressional Delegation, we write to raise our concerns about the Census Bureau's decision to shorten the 2020 Census enumeration timeline from October 31 to September 30, 2020, and to compress vital data processing activities into three months from six months. Given that our nation is grappling with the devastating effects of the coronavirus pandemic, it is imperative that we prioritize the implementation of a fair and accurate 2020 decennial Census to ensure recovery funding and other federal resources are directed to the communities most in need. Therefore, we strongly urge you to revise the enumeration deadline back to October 31, 2020 to ensure that the Census Bureau has adequate time to count residents, in light of the challenges posed by the public health crisis and to extend statutory data delivery timelines by 120 calendar days.

The recent decision to rush remaining field operations calls into question how the Census Bureau will effectively and accurately count millions of households that did not respond to the Census count on their own, especially in communities hit hardest by the pandemic. On April 13, 2020, the U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. Census Bureau issued a joint statement announcing adjustments to 2020 operations, citing challenges related to public health and ensuring an accurate count of all communities.<sup>1</sup> In the statement, the Census Bureau sought statutory relief from Congress, requesting 120 additional calendar days to allow for apportionment counts, with a comparable extension of the deadline for releasing redistricting data. On August 3, 2020, the Census Director issued a statement reversing course and ending field data collection on September 30, 2020, a month earlier than planned.<sup>2</sup> Senior Census Bureau officials said unequivocally this past Spring that it was too late for the Bureau to finish Census operations well and report initial results for congressional apportionment by the current statutory deadline of December 31, 2020. In fact, an internal Census Bureau analysis from August warns of the risk of "serious errors" in the data if the Census Bureau is

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau. *U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and U.S. Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham Statement on 2020 Census Operational Adjustments Due to COVID-19*. (April 13, 2020). Online at <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/statement-covid-19-2020.html>.

<sup>2</sup> United States Census Bureau. *Statement from U.S. Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham: Delivering a Complete and Accurate 2020 Census Count*. (August 3, 2020). Online at <https://2020census.gov/en/news-events/press-releases/delivering-complete-accurate-count.html>

forced to complete the count and process the data including quality checks under the current statutory deadline.<sup>3</sup>

In the middle of a global pandemic, this move could cause the Bureau to miss counting millions of households and risk an inaccurate census that deprives harder-to-count communities of federal assistance needed to recover from the pandemic. The House has already approved the extended reporting deadlines, as the Administration requested and we are confident that Congress will finalize such a legislative fix — to ensure that remaining counting operations, data processing, and quality assurance activities are not rushed — as soon as the Administration confirms that request.<sup>4</sup>

In our home state of Michigan, each person counted in the 2010 Census brought \$1,800 per year in Census-guided federal spending for vital services and programs. An undercount in 2020 would deprive our state, municipalities, and residents of resources and political representation for the next decade. Shortening the 2020 Census will have vast implications for 3.3 million people who historically are considered hard-to-count in the State of Michigan, based on the Census Bureau’s Low Response Score calculation. Significant efforts and investments have been made at the national, state, and local levels to ensure robust and equitable Census participation in all of Michigan, and especially in harder-to-reach communities. Yet with COVID-19 disproportionately impacting communities of color and claiming the lives of more than 6,500 Michiganders, announcing a newly adjusted deadline will make it even harder for these communities to participate and complete the Census, denying them valuable resources aimed at improving their quality of life and standards of living for the next decade.

The decennial Census is foundational to our Nation’s democracy. We look forward to working with you to uphold our constitutional obligation to ensure a fair and accurate count of every person living in the United States. Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/  
BRENDA L. LAWRENCE  
Member of Congress

/s/  
DANIEL T. KILDEE  
Member of Congress

/s/  
ANDY LEVIN  
Member of Congress

/s/  
HALEY M. STEVENS  
Member of Congress

/s/  
DEBBIE DINGELL  
Member of Congress

/s/  
ELISSA SLOTKIN  
Member of Congress

/s/  
RASHIDA TLAIB  
Member of Congress

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<sup>3</sup> Committee on Oversight and Reform. *Oversight Committee Releases New Internal Census Bureau Document Warning of Risk of “Serious Errors.”* (September 2, 2020). Online at <https://oversight.house.gov/news/press-releases/oversight-committee-releases-new-internal-census-bureau-document-warning-of-risk>

<sup>4</sup> H.R. 6800, The Heroes Act. Sec. 70201. Modification of 2020 Census Deadlines and Tabulation of Population. (May 15, 2020). Online at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/6800/text>